

Message Text

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PAGE 01 ASUNCI 00693 201710Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASUNCION 0693

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, PGOV, PA
SUBJ: MEETING WITH PRESIDENT STROESSNER

1. AT MY REQUEST, PRESIDENT STROESSNER RECEIVED ME THE MORNING OF FEBRUARY 20. PRIOR TO LEAVING FOR WASHINGTON I HAD WANTED TO GET ANY RESPONSE HE MIGHT HAVE TO PRESIDENT CARTER'S LETTER WHICH INCLUDED A REFERENCE TO THE VISIT OF THE INTER-AMERICAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION. I HAD HOPED OUR MEETING MIGHT ENCOURAGE HIM TO COME TO A FAVORABLE DECISION.

2. I SPENT APPROXIMATELY ONE HALF HOUR WITH PRESIDENT STROESSNER. HE SPOKE IN THE USUAL VEIN ABOUT THE USUAL THINGS INCLUDING MANY REFERENCES TO THE ANTI-COMMUNIST RECORD OF PARAGUAY AND THE OVERWHELMING MANDATE GIVEN TO HIM BY THE PEOPLE EXERCISING THEIR DEMOCRATIC FRANCHISE.

3. HE OPENED UP THE THEME OF HUMAN RIGHTS WITH LAVISH PRAISE FOR THE RECENT SPEECH OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY TODMAN SAYING THIS WAS THE FIRST SIGN HE HAD SEEN THAT SOMEONE IN WASHINGTON UNDERSTOOD HOW LATIN AMERICA PERCEIVED THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION'S HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY.

4. WHEN HE CAME TO THE VISIT OF THE IAHRC HE WAS VAGUE AND SAID NO MORE THAN THAT THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS WAS NEGOTIATING WITH THE COMMISSION NOW. HE DID NOT SAY ABOUT
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 ASUNCI 00693 201710Z

WHAT. WHEN I PRESSED HIM HE SAID THE IAHRC SHOULD AS A TOP PRIORITY INVESTIGATE THE ATROCITIES NOW BEING COMMITTED IN COLOMBIA. HE THEN TOLD ME "NOT TO WORRY, THAT ALL WOULD BE ARRANGED."

5. I MET IMMEDIATELY AFTER WITH PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR PAPPALARDO WHO LISTENED TO MY ACCOUNT AND SAID IT HAD ALL GONE MAGNIFI-

CENTLY. WHEN I GAVE HIM A SKEPTICAL LOOK AND SAID THAT IT WAS ALL VERY PLEASANT BUT NOT VERY PRECISE, HE SAID HE KNEW FOR A FACT THAT PRESIDENT STROESSNER HAD GIVEN ORDER TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER ON FEBRUARY 13 (THE DAY AFTER THE ELECTION) TO FIX A DATE FOR THE IAHRC VISIT.

6. COMMENT: I CANNOT PLACE MUCH CONFIDENCE IN PAPPALARDO'S ASSURANCES. HIS RECORD OF UNRELIABILITY ON THE IAHRC VISIT STEMS FROM HIS UNFORTUNATE, UNAUTHORIZED TELEPHONE CALL TO THE DEPARTMENT A YEAR AGO, WHENCE DERIVES THE AURA OF BAD FAITH WHICH HAS CONTINUED TO SURROUND THIS QUESTION. ON FEBRUARY 16, NOGUES PASSED A MESSAGE TO ME THAT HE WOULD TRY TO TALK THE PRESIDENT INTO AUTHORIZING HIM TO FIX A DATE WITH THE IAHRC WHEN HE MET WITH STROESSNER THE NEXT DAY. ALSO ON FEBRUARY 16, CENTRAL BANK PRESIDENT ACOSTA TOLD ME HE AND SEVERAL OTHERS WERE STILL TRYING TO CONVINCE STROESSNER OF THE NEED TO SETTLE THE QUESTION QUICKLY.

AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, IT MIGHT BE PRUDENT TO CONCLUDE THE PARAGUAYANS EITHER ARE STILL PLAYING GAMES OR THAT STROESSNER HAS NOT YET MADE UP HIS MIND. ON THE OTHER HAND, STROESSNER RAISED THE SUBJECT WITH ME, AND THAT FACT ALONE MAY BE THE STRONGEST INDICATION THAT HE MAY HAVE DECIDED TO GIVE NOGUES THE GREEN LIGHT TO CONTACT THE IAHRC. WHITE

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